

The CBC, Canadian Culture, and Media Concentration



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The CBC, Canadian Culture, and Media Concentration

Toronto, ONTARIO: On the eve of celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of CBC television, new public opinion research conducted for Friends of Canadian Broadcasting by Ipsos-Reid reveals signs of trouble for Canada's public broadcaster.

Nine-in-ten Canadians want regional CBC services strengthened in their part of the country and, compared to other radio and TV services, the personal value Canadians ascribe to the CBC, though still strong, is declining. At the same time, Canadians have an enduring and growing confidence that CBC is the best way to protect Canadian culture and they want Ottawa to renew CBC and to ensure a cultural identity distinct from the United States.

Canadians' approval of CBC's performance in serving regional audiences is significantly lower than national mandate performance ratings. As well, eight-in-ten agree (51% strongly, 32% somewhat) that 'We should build a new CBC capable of providing high quality Canadian programming with strong regional content throughout Canada.'

The survey findings reveal that a growing number of Canadians want new investment in CBC. Four-in-ten Canadians would recommend their MP support increasing CBC's budget. Public support for new investment in CBC has doubled since 1996. Only 9% would recommend CBC funding cuts.

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The survey also found:

- Eight-in-ten believe it's important for CBC to produce programs in and about their part of the country.
- Almost all Canadians (94%) agree (69% strongly, 25% somewhat) with the statement 'I want to see the CBC survive and prosper.' In addition eight-in-ten (81%) agree (27% strongly, 52% somewhat) that 'The CBC provides value for taxpayers' money.'
- By a two-to-one margin, Canadians believe CBC Television contributes more to Canadian culture and identity than CBC Radio.
- Eight-in-ten Canadians believe that CBC is important in helping to maintain and build Canadian culture and identity.
- 89% agree CBC is one of the things that helps distinguish Canada from the United States.

These are the findings of an Ipsos-Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting between August 6th and August 11th, 2002. The poll was conducted by telephone among a representative random sample of 1,100 adult Canadians, 18 years of age or older. Results from a sample of this size, can be considered accurate to within ± 3.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population.

Canadian Culture and Identity

- Canadians are extremely proud of their culture and identity (94% agree) and an overwhelming 92% agree that it is something we should be proud of (including 70% who strongly agree). Canadians also see a role for government in doing this, a full 89% agree that it is important for the Canadian government to work to maintain and build a culture and identity distinct from the US.



- Further analysis reveals that Canadians from all regions and all political stripes express pride in their culture and identity, believe that we should be promoting it, and see a role for government in this regard.
- Interestingly, Canadians' beliefs that government has an important role to play in maintaining culture and identity appear to be grounded more in pride than in fear. Over eight-in-ten (82%) believe that Canadians currently have at least a moderate sense of their culture and identity, including four-in-ten (39%) who believe that this is strong or very strong.
- Furthermore, a larger proportion believe that our culture and identity is stronger (43%) than weaker (26%) vis a vis the US than five years ago, while twice as many Canadians think we will be better off (39%) rather than worse off (18%) in terms of our culture and identity in five years' time.
- However, the balance shifts to a larger proportion thinking we will be worse off (39%) rather than better off (22%) in five years time with respect to our ability to control our own domestic affairs against pressures from other countries, specifically the United States.

Canadian Content

- The majority of Canadians believe that Canadian content and programming are important overall (79%) and in terms of their impact on helping to maintain and build Canadian culture and identity (74%).
- Consequently, six-in-ten (61%) Canadians believe that there should be a required, minimum level of Canadian programming on Canadian television. Furthermore, almost as many believe that the current regulations requiring one hour of Canadian programming in prime time is too little (57%) .
- Canadians perceive news (93%) and current affairs shows (88%) to provide the highest value as types of Canadian programming, followed by sports (70%) and drama series (60%). Reality shows rank far below the other types with 27% who rate 5-7 on a 7-point scale. Consequently, it is not surprising to find that when asked, 'This fall there will be five Canadian drama series on TV down from 12 that were on TV three years ago... these Canadian drama series have been replaced with other types of Canadian programming, like reality shows...do you think that this is a good thing or



a bad thing in terms of the direction of Canadian programming for the future?,’ almost twice as many Canadians say this is a bad thing (61%) rather than a good thing (34%).

CBC and Culture/Identity

- The vast majority of Canadians believe that the CBC is important in helping to maintain and build Canadian culture and identity (81%), and as a symbol of culture and identity (82%).
- A full 89% also agree (58% strongly, 31% somewhat) that “The CBC is one of the things that helps distinguish Canada from the US.”
- Furthermore, the CBC receives the highest ratings (76%) among 13 groups/organizations examined in terms of public confidence/trust to protect Canadian culture and identity on television.
- While both CBC radio and television are seen as contributing to Canadian identity and culture by a significant number of Canadians, CBC television is the focus for a majority (61%).
- Also noteworthy is that the vast majority of Canadians (83%) continue to see a need for the CRTC and its activities in Canada today.

CBC and its Mandate

- The CBC receives generally positive reviews from 81% of Canadians in meeting its mandate of providing radio and television services incorporating a wide range of programming that informs, enlightens and entertains. However, Canadians give relatively lower performance scores (e.g., excellent/very good) to the CBC in meeting its mandate to reflect Canada and its regions while serving the special needs of those regions (70%).
- Further questioning reveals that Canadians attribute a high level of importance to the issue of CBC’s regional presence and mandate. When asked, ‘(Another part of CBC’s mandate is to reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences, while serving the special needs of those regions)...how important is it that programming made in and about your part of the country be produced...please use a scale from 1 not at all important to 7 very important?,’ a full eight-in-ten (79%) give a higher importance rating (rate 5-7).



- In addition, a full 88% agree (48% strongly, 40% somewhat) with the statement, ‘I would like to see the CBC strengthened in my part/region of the country.’ Almost as many (83%) agree (51% strongly, 32% somewhat) that ‘We should build a new CBC capable of providing high quality Canadian programming with strong regional content throughout Canada.’
- Consequently, Canadians are divided, almost equally between opposing (46%) and supporting (51%) recent changes by the CBC to move some local and regional programming and operations out of some of the country’s regions and centralize them in larger urban centres like Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. However, further analysis reveals that support for the changes is much higher in the three main urban centres (69%) than in the rest of the country (42%).

CBC and Funding

- Canadians are more of a mind to increase the CBC’s funding than to reduce it. Four times as many Canadians would advise their MP to vote for an increase (41%) rather than decrease (9%) in funding for the CBC from current levels.
- In addition to the importance and performance results presented earlier, these funding results are consistent with other opinions uncovered in the survey. Almost all Canadians (94%) agree (69% strongly, 25% somewhat) with the statement ‘I want to see the CBC survive and prosper.’ In addition eight-in-ten (81%) agree (27% strongly, 52% somewhat) that ‘The CBC provides value for taxpayers’ money.’

CBC and the Competition

- Compared to other television and radio sources that they use, Canadians ascribe a higher level of personal value (64% rate 5-7) to what they watch and listen to on the CBC.
- Furthermore, among English speaking Canadians, the CBC is chosen by almost twice (46%) as many respondents over CTV (25%) or Global (20%) individually as having the most balanced reporting about Canada’s political parties. CTV ranks second and Global third. Among French speaking Canadians, CBC (35%) and TVA (32%) are named by almost equal numbers.



- Specific comparisons (English interviews only) between the two private broadcasters reveals that CTV is chosen by close to twice as many Canadians over Global on three attributes – stronger on Canadian programming (63% vs. 28%), spends more on Canadian content (61% vs. 28%), and delivers the more trusted news (59% vs. 32%). Global is chosen by close to twice as many Canadians over CTV on one attribute – stronger on American programming (60% vs. 28%).

Media Concentration

- Canadians are cautiously confident in the performance of the media in presenting news and information that is objective and balanced. While few Canadians believe that this is always the case, a very small proportion believe that the media are never objective and balanced.

	Always	Some	Never	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
In Canadian newspapers	15	77	6	2
On Canadian TV stations	20	77	3	1
On Canadian radio stations	19	74	3	4

- Moreover, twice as many Canadians believe that the news and information presented on Canadian TV and radio stations is more rather than less objective and balanced compared with five years ago. Assessments of Canadian newspapers are more divided.



	More	Same	Less	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
In Canadian newspapers	28	44	25	4
On Canadian TV stations	38	42	18	2
On Canadian radio stations	32	47	15	7

- Questioning on related attitudes toward media concentration shows that over three-quarters (78%) of Canadians believe that owners of media outlets have gone too far in trying to inject their own personal politics into what their outlets report, while about two-thirds (68%) believe that media concentration undermines Canada's democracy and (62%) that there is too much media concentration in Canada today. However, two-thirds (64%) also believe that Canadian media need to be concentrated to some extent to be competitive.
- Given majority concern about media concentration, the vast majority of Canadians believe that the federal government should do something about media concentration (only 9% said the government should do nothing). Each of the three options presented for action receive support including asking the CRTC to act (32%), holding a public inquiry (28%) and strengthening the CBC to provide a counter-balance (22%).

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